

Observations – Alan Line - Bulletin 338/11

Ian Burns has provided background information on Sir Hugh Allan of Allan Line. Hugh Allan was born in Saltcoats, Ayrshire in on 29th September 1810. He immigrated to Canada and settled in Montreal in 1826. Here he found a job as a clerk in a commercial goods business. He became a partner in the Allan Line, an ocean-going shipping line. Ten years later, in 1836, backed by family money he bought steamships and sailing ships to expand the Allan merchant fleet. In 1853, as president of the Montreal Board of Trade he persuaded the Canadian government to finance the transatlantic lines linking Montreal with Britain through contracts to carry mail. When the contract was awarded to Liverpool ship-owners, McKean, McClary and Lamont, Allan considered them unqualified to handle the work. In 1856, with improved ships, Allan managed to wrest the contract away from his competitors. He took on the contract using his Montreal Ocean Steam ship Company, starting in April of that year. His relationship with the Conservative politicians enabled him to win back a contract to deepen the St Lawrence in 1854. By 1859 he was one of the wealthiest men in the province. In 1862 the British Secretary of War accused him of charging excessive fares, and causing the death of many immigrants. He was also charged with bribery in the Pacific Scandal of 1873 that brought down the Conservative government. In return for donating campaign funds to the party, he had hoped to receive the charter for building the Canadian Pacific Railway. Sir Hugh Allan died in 1882.